

Pick up a copy of Mary Pratt's *Practical Science for Gardeners*; reading it will be like enjoying a conversation over the fence with well-informed gardening neighbor.—*Lee Luckeydoe, Herbarium, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.*

BEN-ERIK VAN WYK. 2005. **Food Plants of the World.** (ISBN 0-88192-743-0, hbk.). Timber Press Inc. 133 S.W. Second Ave, Suite 450, Portland, OR 97204-3527, U.S.A. (Orders: www.timberpress.com, mail@timberpress.com, 503-227-2878, 1-800-327-5680, 503-227-3070 fax). \$39.95, 480 pp., many color photos, 6 1/2" × 9 1/2".

Have you ever looked at unfamiliar produce, beans, grains, or spices in the groceries and asked yourself—What is that, where does it originate from, and more importantly, what parts can you eat and what preparation is needed? Author Ben-Erik van Wyk has provided the answers to such questions in his book, *Food Plants of the World*. van Wyk, has constructed a food plant encyclopedia, listing information on 354 food plants and their close relatives, complete with fantastic color photographs. *Food Plants of the World* would be a great resource for food scientists and epicures alike.

The first section of the book lists primary crops by regions: i.e. central Asia, Africa, etc. This is followed by major food categories, such as cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, herb, sugars, beverage plants, spices and flavors. Descriptions of the major food categories include information on general anatomy, basics on processing and cooking, and other interesting facts. Within each food category, are lists of the "main" plants by common names, followed by the scientific names. This list of primary foods in the category is important as a quick reference to determine the scientific name of common foods, although common names are also found in the index. The author has included some intriguing color photographs of foods within a category with common names in the captions, for instance for cereals, the photograph shows lines of different grains. Note that the author admittedly uses the labels of fruit and vegetable in the "grocery," not in the botanical sense.

The bulk of the text is the food plant "encyclopedia" in alphabetical order by specific epithet. Each food entry contains vibrant color images of the plant, as well as the edible portions. Following the food photographs, are descriptions including the plant description, origin and history, parts consumed, cultivation and harvesting, uses, nutritional value, assorted notes, common names in various languages and the family to which the species belongs. The descriptions are very thorough and the common names in multiple languages can be very helpful when shopping in different groceries or markets for foods and spices.

The author has included handy references after the food encyclopedia. The first is a section discussing the structure and function of nutrient compounds. The chemical structures of various sugars, starches, fats, proteins, vitamins and minerals are included in the discussion. The descriptions of the different structures describe a small portion of the chemistry of how the body processes such molecules and compounds, and often, the author has provided a little information on the food sources that many of the various compounds are derived from. The second reference included is a quick guide to commercialized food plants, with common name, edible portions, country of origin, and base nutritional values. The remaining items include a glossary, further reading section, and index.

Food Plants of the World by Ben-Erik van Wyk is highly recommended for those in food sciences or anyone with a general interest in learning more about the foods consumed around the world. The text is thorough and sharp, and the color photographs are fantastic in helping to visualize the plant in the field and the edible portions. This could be a wonderful reference book or gift for cooks, horticultural students or "foodies" in general. Definitely a book worth a look!—*Lee Luckeydoe, Herbarium, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.*